

# MASONIC ANTIQUARIANS AND CRANKS

## TAKE DUE NOTICE THEREOF

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## PART I

Envisioning a group more deeply invested in exploring and understanding its own origins than organized Freemasonry is hard to imagine.

When it comes to the cavalcade of early writing about the history and evolution of Freemasonry, we see in those early accounts how writers recorded from inside the frame with little regard to the influence of what was happening in history outside the Fraternity. Shaped by limited resources and interpretations that sometimes prioritized myth over fact, some writings are little more than imaginary, tormented with a legion of problems. Evidence was not always the pillar upon which many of those writings were based, yet the enduring allure continues to influence perceptions of the Fraternity's history.

The pioneering works of two professional English historians, **Douglas Knoop and Gwilym P. Jones**, were published in 1940 and 1947—*A Short History of Freemasonry to 1730*, then *Genesis of Freemasonry, An Account of The Rise And Development of Freemasonry In Its Operative, Accepted, and Early Speculative Phase*.

Although these two important books and other Masonic writings from Knoop were available for the next two decades and drew attention inside Masonic circles, there was little attention paid to them by professional and academically trained historians.

In 1969, **John Morris Roberts**, an English historian who specialized in the study of institutions, noted how surprising it was that professional historians in England, the country that gave Freemasonry to the world, had not found any interest in the subject, and how they had ignored the influence of Masonry as a cultural agency, as generators and transmitters of ideas, symbols, and as sources of attitudes and images reflecting the times. His opinion was that Masonic history had been effectively abandoned, at least prior the Knoop and Jones work, to “Masonic Antiquarians and cranks.”<sup>1</sup> More simply put (if that is possible), following the publication of

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<sup>1</sup> John Morris Roberts, “Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic,” *The English Historical Review* 84, no. 331, Oxford University Press, April 1969. Note: The term “antiquarian” refers to an individual who studies or collects antiques, rare books, or items of historical significance and dedicated to uncovering cultural, artistic, and literary artifacts of earlier times (Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Routledge, 1995, Alaine Schnapp, *Discovery of the Past*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996). However, Roberts’s use of the term is a criticism and describes an individual who is overly preoccupied with focusing excessively on minutiae or obscure details of the past without connecting them to larger contemporary or theoretical contexts. This critique suggests a narrow or stagnant perspective, where the fascination with artifacts, texts, or historical records is seen as lacking relevance or failing to contribute meaningfully to broader intellectual discussions and carries the connotations of being out of touch with modern scholarship or emphasizing romanticized

James Anderson's "historical opus," *The Constitution of Freemasonry* in 1723, the English language was left mainly to the understanding of amateur historians and conspiracy theorists for the better part of two centuries.<sup>2</sup>

In 1999, thirty years after Roberts's assessment, a rough statistics of books (excluding what can be considered Masonic literature) published in the United Kingdom and the United States between 1959 and 1998 that dealt with general problems of British civilization and culture reveals that only two of the thirty-six gave even a passing mention to Freemasonry.<sup>3</sup> Out of 132 published in the same period about general problems with politics, political ideologies, culture, religious ideas, and political thinking, only seven give a very brief treatment of Masonry. In essence, the study found that "Freemasonry in the same samples comes far behind the Salvation Army."<sup>4</sup>

Yes, these are indeed broad categories through which to attempt a measurement, but the researcher who assembled this data goes on to ask several questions and he reminds us that the *theme* of Freemasonry itself is vast and multifaceted.<sup>5</sup> The questions he asks begin with whether Freemasonry was overlooked by professional historians, social scientists, and others in the academic field at the time (and earlier) due to a perception of it being an *unserious* subject. Was it dismissed as merely a collection of rituals and secretive practices without deeper societal or theological implications? Alternatively, could it have been discounted as a phenomenon of limited consequence or substantive value?<sup>6</sup> He concludes that if any of these factors played a role, they might have been compounded by so many fragmented and mythologized histories written by Masons themselves prior to and even during the study period. And these narratives, though well-intentioned, may have contributed to a sense of disorganization or inconsistency that discouraged rigorous academic inquiry into the subject.<sup>7</sup>

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In 1972, **Frances A. Yates**, an English historian who focused on studying the Renaissance would probably have agreed with the conclusion of that 1999 study. In 1972, she added to John Roberts's analysis, indicating that prior to Knoop and Jones, many Masonic "histories" were

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nostalgia over critical analysis. Robert's use of the term "crank" in this context refers to those whose ideas or theories are considered eccentric, unorthodox, or lacking credibility within the established academic community. While "cranks" may passionately promote their perspectives, their work is easily characterized for being poorly substantiated, overly speculative, or resistant to constructive critique.

<sup>2</sup> Mathew D. J. Scablon, "The Origins of Freemasonry," *Handbook of Freemasonry*, Chapter 5, editors Henrick Bogdan, Jan A.M. Snoek, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2014. See Alexander

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry: A Study of a Phenomenon*, Vintage Press, 1999, republished in 1997 by Harvill Press under the title *Who's Afraid of Freemasons? The Phenomenon of Freemasonry*. Note: there are copies of both works that also bear dates of 1996 and reprints with the year 2000.

<sup>4</sup> IBID.

<sup>5</sup> IBID.

<sup>6</sup> IBID.

<sup>7</sup> IBID

conspicuously shy on evidence and teemed with a unique level of piety and glorification of the *idea* of Freemasonry.<sup>8</sup> As a result, she sounded a cautionary warning to anyone considering their research on Freemasonry or areas related to it based on available Masonic literature. She cautioned that most materials and “misty discussions deservedly sink below the notice of the serious historian” to the extent that the “serious inquirer” may “end up sinking helplessly in a bottomless bog.”<sup>9</sup> Other professional historians shared Yates’s view, noting that the same rigorous standards of research and critical evaluation applied in their disciplines were often absent in studies of Masonic history.

A desire to understand the appeal and function of fraternal orders launched historian **Lynn Dumenil’s** seminal study of American Freemasonry. The book she wrote about her findings, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, was published in 1984. Her work is perhaps one of the most overlooked accounts, at least by Freemasons, about how, when, and why the

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philosophical and intellectual qualities of the institution went off the rails. Her historical analysis is not found or cited in many Masonic writings, but her book accomplishes what later historian and French writer **Charles Porset** believed is necessary to put the history of Masonry “back its rightful place.”<sup>10</sup> Dumenil concluded that “A major concern of American Freemasonry became and remains the aggrandizement and perpetuation of the organization. Its survival was and continues to be an end in itself.”<sup>11</sup> Twelve years later in 1996, American historian **Stephen C. Bullock** concluded that “Divergent

Russian historian and scholar **Alexander Piatigorsky’s** work, *Freemasonry: A Study of a Phenomenon*, was published in 1999.<sup>13</sup> His research led him to consider the institution of Freemasonry from the point of view of both Masons and their critics, as well as his own. He found Freemasonry a complex phenomenon that went beyond being a mere fraternal organization or secret society. Piatigorsky was intrigued by its intellectual depth, symbolic framework, and its attempts at shaping human and societal improvement through ritualized philosophy. Freemasonry, in his perspective, represented a synthesis of tradition and rationality—a cultural and symbolic vessel for transmitting philosophical, ethical, and spiritual principles across generations.<sup>14</sup> His research was, to a large extent, overlooked by the American Masonic audience. Nevertheless, his compelling work stands as a philosophical examination of Freemasonry and cultural and intellectual phenomenon, rather than merely a historical account of its development. There are two specific chapters in Piatigorsky’s book noted in more detail later in this writing.

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<sup>8</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Routledge, and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1972.

<sup>9</sup> IBID.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Porset, “Masonic Historiography,” Chapter 8, *Handbook of Freemasonry*, Brill, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, Princeton University Press, 1984.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen C. Bullock, “Initiating the Enlightenment? – Recent Works on European Freemasonry,” *Eighteenth Century Life*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Piatigorsky.

<sup>14</sup> IBID.

In 2014, **Charles Porset**, citing Stephen Bullock’s 1996 observation, added, “Divergent understandings of Masonry may be inevitable,” but that does not give *cart blanche* to anyone to write whatever they want to.”<sup>15</sup> Porset notes that the expression *Masonology* was coined in the 1960s “to bring about at last the application of modern scientific historical methods to Masonic history.”<sup>16</sup> He agreed that adding the suffix “ology,” was a good idea in itself, but the use of the term *Masonology* to describe a new branch of history with academic legitimacy simply did not catch on everywhere. Porset makes the case that too many Masons had written about Masonry in a way that produced “mere *data*,” instead of aiming to analyze the origins and evolution of Freemasonry, its impact on society, and the role it has played in shaping historical events, or how it was shaped by them. He says the task for historians (Masons and non-Masons alike) is “to re-evaluate the modern era, not using Freemasonry as the point of departure, but by putting Masonry back in its rightful place.”<sup>17</sup> In his call to reject mere romantic versions, sweeping generalizations, myths and opinion, or imagination-based writings about Masonry that merely scratch the surface, he characterizes such material as “reader chicken feed disguised as history.”<sup>18</sup>

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It is evident that achieving academic legitimacy requires a steadfast commitment to producing reliable and factual accounts. This entails a clear departure from the “chicken feed” writing that

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Porset critiques, favoring instead rigorous, evidence-based scholarship. Only through diligent research and meticulous verification of sources can the history and philosophy of Freemasonry be presented in a manner that withstands scrutiny and garners respect within academic circles. The path forward leaves no room for superficial or sensationalist interpretations.

The founders of **Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076** (QC) recognized that path forward. Known today as the world's premier Masonic research lodge, QC was established in London in 1884 and introduced the concept of the “authentic school” research into Freemasonry.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Porset.

<sup>16</sup> IBID.

<sup>17</sup> IBID.

<sup>18</sup> Porset uses that term to describe what he calls the para-Masonry writings found on “shelves of ‘specialist’ books shops, not all books and recounting of Masonic history by Masons or others.

<sup>19</sup> John A. Hamill, “Masonic History and Historians”, *Ars Quator Coronatorum*, Vol 99, 1986. Note: Taken from Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 website at: <https://www.quatuorcoronati.com/>, “The *authentic school* of Masonic research is grounded in a methodology that prioritizes accuracy, rigor, and objectivity. This approach places a strong emphasis on primary sources, such as historical documents, archival records, and official proceedings, rather than relying on speculative theories or anecdotal accounts. Scholars within this school aim to separate verifiable facts from allegorical interpretations, recognizing the importance of context and credible evidence. By adhering to these principles, the authentic school seeks to provide a clear and unbiased understanding of Freemasonry's origins, development, and influence, ensuring that

The intent of the concept was to replace the more imaginative writings of earlier authors in favor of a rational, empirical attitude toward the history of the Craft and produce an accurate and unbiased picture.

The body of work by this Research Lodge remains a model today and has constructively influenced generations of Masons to join the parade to march away from that bottomless bog to which Yates refers. Regardless, many more miles to march remain and more marchers are needed. The efforts of the QC have laid a solid foundation but the ongoing pursuit of clarity and coherence within Masonic history demands sustained dedication if myths are going to be dispelled and future contributions ensure that Freemasonry evolves while staying rooted in its core principles.

By the late 1800s, continuing through the 1900s and into today, we do find Masonic authors that have played an integral role in preserving and shaping the intellectual legacy of Freemasonry. Though not all have backgrounds of formally trained historians, these individuals have penned works that have become essential contributions to classic Masonic literature. They can be likened to "Documentarians," engaged in thoughtful inquiry who approached the Craft with a blend of curiosity, reflection, and analytical rigor, grounded in their own firsthand experiences within the quarries. Their writings often go beyond exploring the historical and symbolic aspects of Freemasonry; they also examined its broader cultural impact, shedding light on the order's influence on its members and on society at large. They contextualized Masonry within the evolving landscape of history, providing a valuable lens through which to consider its continuing relevance.

**Andrew S. McBride** is one such author who has contributed significantly to the understanding of Freemasonry. His insights complement the works of other prominent Masonic writers, as they also complement his. **Joseph Fort Newton, Delmar D. Darrah, H.L. Haywood, W.L. Wilmshurst, Carl Claudy, Ray V. Denslow, Henry Coil, and Dwight L. Smith** are among the authors since the early 1900s who have crafted writings that should be familiar to every member who approaches Masonry with a desire to learn. Together, they bridge the gap between historical context and evolving interpretations, forming cohesive narratives that enrich the Craft and offer an opportunity for deeper reflection—at least for those who study Masonry.

But these names represent only a brief list of writers who offer a comprehensive and authentic representation of Masonry and its significance in our culture and larger society. There are others<sup>20</sup> in the 1900s and certainly thus far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who also stand as bulwarks against the *antiquarians and cranks* to which Roberts refers in 1969.

Returning to the matter of Alexander Piatigorsky's seminal work, *Freemasonry: A Study of a Phenomenon*, two chapters stand out for their thoughtful insights and critical perspectives. These are Chapter 8, titled "American Freemasonry: A Tale to Tell," and Chapter 14, "Freemasonry: A Phenomenon of Social Abstraction." Both chapters unravel intricate dimensions of Freemasonry,

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the organization's history is portrayed with both integrity and scholarly precision."

<sup>20</sup> i.e., J.W. Norwood, Charles C. Hunt, Harry Carr, Bruce H. Hunt, Thomas W. Jackson, S. Brent Morris, Arturo de Hoyos, Pierre G. Normand, W. Kirk MacNulty, John Cooper, John Belton, Robert G. Davis, Robert L.D. Cooper, Christopher L. Hodapp, John M. Hamill, Mark A. Tabbert, Michael A. Halleran, Shawn Eyer, Christopher L. Murphy, Ric Berman, David Stevenson, Andrew Prescott, Susan Summers, Margaret Jacobs, and Andrew Hammer, to name only a few noted above as "others."

examining its cultural, social, and historical contexts. Chapter 8 dives into the uniquely American narrative of Freemasonry, exploring how it unfolded in the United States and adapted within the cultural landscape of the nation and later. Chapter 14 offers a philosophical lens, analyzing the abstract social significance of Freemasonry as a phenomenon that transcends simple organizational structures. These chapters exemplify Piatigorsky's ability to intertwine deeper scholarly inquiry with compelling storytelling, which makes it important for understanding the broader scope of his work and branding his contributions as significant to Masonic studies—again, at least for Masons who in fact study Masonry. His unique approach enables a richer understanding beyond surface-level interpretations. So, for Masons who actively study their craft, such contributions are vital and provide both context and depth of the order and how they affect the workings of the Fraternity, its influence on society, or society's influence on it.

Piatigorsky asks if the gap in the velocity of historical change between Freemasonry and the rest of the world (country, society) accounts for all, or most, of the so-called Masonic problems today. He believes what determines the present-day situation of Freemasonry, at least in the eyes of the external observer, is three factors—political, religious, and economic, and contends that the *theme* of Freemasonry is much broader than Freemasonry itself. Thus, Freemasonry serves as both a specific tradition and a gateway to universal themes that address the essence of human existence.

## PART II

### TAKE DUE NOTICE

**A**side from Masonic materials regarding the origins and evolution of Masonry, and the "misty discussions [that] deservedly sink below the notice of the serious historian," similar tendencies appear in other Masonic writings that undermine efforts to establish and sustain academic legitimacy. Within these kinds of texts, myths are often perpetuated even when unmistakable evidence repeatedly contradicts them. And despite being discredited over time, such narratives persist. Too many Masons fail to engage with the evidence that disproves these longstanding tales. Perhaps some consciously choose to preserve the allure of such stories in Masonic lore but do nothing to support any assertion that a prominent level of research standards exist in these misty-based contentions.

#### SOME MISTY MASONIC MYTHS

In 2013, an inquiry into the 128-year-old evidence-troubled claim that frontiersman **Davy Crockett** was a Freemason revealed it to be one of the classic misty myths of American Masonic history. This instance underscores the broader tendency within Masonic history to blend legendary accounts with historical records, a practice that often blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction.

The 21st-century inquiry into the origins of the claim that Davy Crockett was a Freemason revealed that the narrative largely stemmed from an article published in the *Tennessean*

newspaper on Saturday, May 12, 1897. This article detailed historical items exhibited at the 1897 Tennessee Centennial in Nashville, Tennessee, including a Masonic apron purportedly belonging to Davy Crockett. According to the article, the apron was displayed in the Exhibit Hall during the celebration. The story resurfaced four months later in the September 4, 1897 issue of the *Missouri Freemason Magazine*, which reported the apron had been loaned to the Tennessee Historical Society by a Kentucky man who explained that it “was given to him by a descendant of a friend who was one of the ‘old time settlers and associate of Crockett.’”<sup>21</sup>

The *Missouri Freemason Magazine*’s account further amplified the growing belief that Crockett was a Freemason. Within five months, the same report circulated in additional newspapers across America, solidifying this connection in both Masonic and popular consciousness. Despite the widespread circulation of the story, an official inventory of the Tennessee Centennial exhibits does not document a Masonic apron mentioned anywhere on display.<sup>22</sup> The University of Tennessee has in its archives a list of exhibits sponsored by the university at the Centennial event. According to the listings, “a replica of the Alamo, where Davy Crockett and other Tennesseans died” was reproduced for the Centennial. The size and location where the replica was on display is not noted. There is no mention of a Masonic apron on display or another mention of Davy Crockett.<sup>23</sup>

Also used by some Masons as evidence that Crockett was a Mason came from a misread entry in a passage from the 290-page 1899 book by Masonic scholar and author, Robert Freke Gould. In the book *Military Lodges: The Apron and the Sword or Freemasonry Under Arms Being an Account of Lodges in Regiments and Ships of War and of Famous Soldiers and Sailors of All Countries Who Have Belonged to the Society*, Gould mentions Crockett. In that entry he noted the names of two confirmed Freemasons.

Gould wrote:

Generals Stephen Austin, the liberator of Texas, and ‘Sam’ Houston, the recognized hero of the Texan War of Independence, were Freemasons; also, Colonel David Crockett, backwoodsman, and Member of Congress, who fought on the same side, and after a hard siege surrendered to General Santa

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<sup>21</sup> *Lincoln Evening Call*, Lincoln, Nebraska, September 29, 1826, p.3, *Marion Star*, Marion, Ohio, October 1, 1896, p. 3, *Buffalo Evening News*, Buffalo, New York, October 1, 1896, p.5, *Leavenworth Times*, Leavenworth, Kansas, October 3, 1896, p.4, *Daily Express*, Beatrice, Nebraska, November 12, 1896, p.3, research subscription to 11,2000 newspapers from 1700-2000, Newspapers. Com. Note: Steve Harrison, Past Master and Editor, *Missouri Freemason Magazine*, confirmed on February 17, 2013, in correspondence with the author, that a copy of the *Missouri Freemason*, weekly issue, Volume 1, No. 32, September 4, 1897, Page 1, is not in the magazine archives at the Grand Lodge of Missouri. In December 2018, the author was assisted by Samuel Thomas, Grand Lodge of Missouri researcher, John Hess, Past Grand Master and Curator at the Missouri Lodge of Research, and the current editor of the magazine and Past Grand Master, Dave Haywood for another search for the 1897 issue. On December 14, 2018, Thomas reported that search found no magazines dated in the 1890s. The magazines in the archives following that decade did not mention of the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition in 1897.

<sup>22</sup> Neal O’Steen, *The Centennial Exposition in Nashville Celebrated the Volunteer State’s First Century*. University of Tennessee’s part of the exhibit piqued public interest, university of Tennessee account of the Centennial, <http://pr.utk.edu/alumnus/winter96/centenn.html>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040703063755/http://pr.utk.edu/alumnus/winter96/centenn.html>, accessed December 2018.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Bizzack, “Unraveling Tall Tales A 21st Century Investigation Into The Disputable Masonic Claims That Daniel Boone And Davy Crockett Were Freemasons,” BSF Foundation, 2014 in the book, *Notable Men In Kentucky Who Happened To Be Freemasons: Notable Men Often Reported as Freemasons But Were Not, and Unraveling the Tallest of Tales: Origin of the Myth That Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett Were Freemasons*, BSF Foundation, Lexington, KY, 2014. This research (with the same title) was updated and published again in 2024 in The Transactions of the Rubicon Masonic Society, Volume 1.

Anna, by whose order he was put to death with the other survivors in 1836.<sup>24</sup>

At first glance, it may appear that Gould was claiming that Crockett too was a Mason, but that was not the case. Gould's entry says that Crockett was at the Alamo with Masons—not that he was a Freemason.

Three decades later, the assertion that Crockett was a Mason relied on a fragile account from a Kentucky woman in 1934. This claim originated from a convoluted chain of correspondence that was pieced together by the 2013 research. The documents revealed how this narrative took root, offering a glimpse into the misunderstandings and gaps in historical records that contributed to the association of Crockett with Freemasonry. This chain of events illustrates how a fragile and unverified story managed to evolve into a widely accepted notion, further embedding the claim into widespread belief despite the lack of strong evidence to support it.

In 1934, the secretary of Davy Crockett Lodge No. 1225 in San Antonio, Texas was contacted by the Grand Master of Texas after he was notified about a 1926 letter sent by a Washington, D.C. attorney to the Secretary of the Supreme Council, Southern Jurisdiction. This letter informed us that an article published on September 4, 1897 in Volume 1, No. 32, of the *Missouri Freemason* discussed a Masonic apron that belonged to Davy Crockett and named the Kentucky woman who was reported to be in possession of the apron. That series of letters led to a premature hypothesis that the story the Kentucky woman later told the secretary was true, and that led to what happened next.

In April 1936, a Masonic memorial plaque at the San Jacinto battlefield in Texas, a May 1936 *Texas Freemason Magazine* article with the image of a sketch of the apron, and the engraved Masonic plaque presented at the Alamo in 1976 by the Grand Lodge of Texas all occurred because of the correspondence between the Davy Crockett Lodge secretary and the Kentucky woman. Both memorial plaques bear Crockett's name. Thus, this chain of events led to the now persistently repeated claim, and the assertion appearing on Masonic sites around the world, that Crockett was a Mason. This accounts for Crockett's name showing up on virtually every "Famous Masons" list on the Internet today. Unfortunately, those lists are used by non-Masonic writers who copy and paste the names into their writings under the belief that all the names on these lists were carefully vetted and curated by some creditable Masonic researcher directly from official records of the Institution.

The husband of the Kentucky woman was a Mason and had passed away. She proudly shared her family's history with the secretary, recounting that the Masonic apron had been loaned to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition for exhibition in 1897. Her tale captivated the imagination of those who heard it, especially after she sent the secretary a drawing of the apron, which featured images of the York Rite Royal Arch.

Although the woman lived until 1954, no document is known to exist that proves that anyone in the 1930s or later saw or arranged examination of the actual apron that she claimed was in her

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<sup>24</sup> Gould, although listing many men as members of military lodges in his book, made no mention of Daniel Boone in connection to a military lodge or a Freemason.

possession and belonged to the King of the Wild Frontier. This absence of tangible evidence cast further doubts on the authenticity of the claim and highlights the challenges in verifying such historical anecdotes. Without concrete documentation or eyewitness accounts, it remains impossible to substantiate whether the artifact truly existed or was merely part of an exaggerated, embellished, or misinterpreted narrative. No matter, the sketch of the apron she provided to the secretary was displayed at the Grand Lodge of Texas as part of its historical collection and became the basis of the long-standing erroneous assumption that the Alamo defender was a Freemason.<sup>25</sup>

And there is more.

Aside from finding evidence that disassembled the Kentucky woman's story about why no mention existed with the records of the Tennessee Grand Lodge of Crockett's membership and the tale she conveyed about what her husband told her about the apron, the 2013 research uncovered what was overlooked in 1934.

There was indeed a man named Crockett who was a Freemason in Tennessee. In fact, he was made a Mason in October 1838, at Trenton Lodge No. 86—a year after he was elected to the United States Congress. That lodge is located in Trenton, Gibson County, Tennessee, which is located about ten miles from Rutherford, Tennessee, where Davy Crockett resided until he left for Texas in 1835 and met his fate at the Alamo in March 1836. Records show that it was Davy Crockett's son, John Wesley Crockett, who was a Mason at Trenton Lodge. A York Rite Chapter met at Trenton Lodge. John Wesley Crockett, an attorney and newspaper editor was defeated in his 1841 re-election for another term in congress. And, like his father who, after his defeat for re-election to congress in 1835, left Tennessee to go to Texas, John Wesley Crockett left Tennessee to go to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he became a newspaper editor and spent the remainder of his life.<sup>26</sup> There is no known record of his involvement with Freemasonry in Louisiana, so leaving *his* apron with someone in Tennessee cannot be discounted.

To summarize, the account provided by the Kentucky woman was fundamentally inaccurate. The secretary of the Davy Crockett Lodge in Texas, along with others at the time and later, accepted her account without further research or corroboration beyond what they were told. In essence, they ran with it. There is no known record indicating that several other stories she provided the

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secretary to support her claim were followed up. Had there been a more thorough follow-up, there is reason to believe that her story would have been viewed with a far more skeptical eye.<sup>27</sup>

If Davy Crockett was a Mason, valid evidence to support the claim that arose from these events in the 1930s does not exist.

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<sup>25</sup> IBID.

<sup>26</sup> IBID.

<sup>27</sup> IBID.

The 21st-century research also finds there was an apparent sense of urgency to associate Davy Crockett's name with the Freemasons who fought for Texas's independence at the Alamo, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming Texas Masonry's Centennial in 1936. This effort appears to have been driven by the desire to commemorate and celebrate Masonic contributions during such a historic event. The allure of including Crockett alongside other confirmed Masons at the Alamo seemingly rendered the 1934 narrative too appealing to resist, even in the absence of substantial evidence. This eagerness to link Crockett to the Fraternity overshadowed the necessity for rigorous corroboration, thus allowing the story to take root in Masonic history.<sup>28</sup> The persistence of such tales highlights the human desire to connect iconic figures to meaningful institutions, a practice in American Masonry that often seems to prioritize sentiment over verification.

A lesser known claim of yet another supposed Davy Crockett apron came from a different source on April 1, 1976, when an unmistakably antique, hand-painted Masonic apron was presented to Buena Park Lodge No. 357 in Buena Park, California. Unlike the apron the Kentucky woman described and provided a sketch for in her 1934 letter, this apron does not bear images of the Royal Arch.<sup>29</sup> The apron was presented to the Buena Park Lodge by a Mason who, in 1925, was made a member of United Lodge No. 5, in Pleasant Hope, Missouri in Polk County—the same town in which his grandmother lived. This apron ended up in periodic displays at Henry Coil Library and the Museum of Freemasonry in San Francisco.<sup>30</sup>

Research in 2013 traced this Crockett apron story and found that it is based on the same kind of family stories on which the 1936 Texas apron is based—clouded by inconsistencies and want of verifiable evidence. The presenter of the apron provided his family's narrative about how his grandmother was Davy Crockett's daughter. While intriguing, every angle of the story falls into the realm of genuine folklore, which is dismantled by public records that prove the Crockett who died at the Alamo did not have a daughter with name of the grandmother that passed on the apron.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the grandmother was born in Missouri in 1856—twenty-years after Crockett was killed at the Alamo in 1836.<sup>32</sup>

The 2013 research did find the logical explanation about to whom the apron belonged.<sup>33</sup>

The grandmother married a man who was made a Mason in Polk County, Missouri where she lived.<sup>34</sup> The apron, which was certainly not one that belonged to the Davy Crockett who fell at the Alamo but most likely to her late husband, and she had passed it on to her daughter, who was the mother of the Mason who gave it to Buena Park Lodge. Furthermore, there were well over

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<sup>28</sup> IBID.

<sup>29</sup> Adam G. Kendall, Curator, Henry Wilson Coil Library and Museum of Freemasonry, San Francisco, California, correspondence with author, May 17, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> IBID.

<sup>31</sup> "David Crockett His Descendants and What They Are Doing: An Authentic History from Texas." Correspondence of the *Courier-Journal*, printed Nov 18, 1879, in the *Daily Inter Ocean*, Transcribed by K. Torp. Judy L. Hasday, *Davy Crockett (Legends of the Wild West)*. New York, Chelsea House Publications, 2010, Michael Wallis, *David Crockett: The Lion of the West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> State of Missouri, Missouri Birth Records, 1851-1910, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, May 2011, and Michael A. Lofaro, David Crockett, The Texas State Historical Association, 1997-2002, The Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/print/CC/fcr24.html> accessed, June 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Bizzack, *Unraveling Tall Tales*.

<sup>34</sup> *History of Hickory, Polk, Cedar, Dade and Braton Counties*, St. Louis, MO: Good Speed, 1889.

sixty families in Polk and surrounding counties of Missouri in the 1800s with the last name of Crockett and many had a family member named David, as can be seen in historical public records from the time.<sup>35</sup> The grandmother, whose maiden name was indeed Crockett and was born in Missouri, was related to some other David Crockett in that area rather than the one from Tennessee. The basis of this story is simply misconstrued family lore.

If Davy Crockett was a Freemason, the evidence to support the contention is yet to be found in the stories surrounding the Texas and California aprons.

## OTHER NOTABLE MISTY MYTHS

The belief that **Daniel Boone, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, all the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and all generals serving under George Washington during the American Revolution** were also Freemasons continues to persist in widely circulated lists of notable men reported to be Masons. These lists, however, must be approached with caution, as they were often created by Masons who, perhaps with the best intentions, were misled or assumed the accuracy of names appearing on earlier lists. Over time, these assumptions became perpetuated, and names were repeatedly published without rigorous verification. Even when substantial evidence exists to refute such claims, the narratives endure, illustrating the tendency for historical inaccuracies to cement themselves through repetition.<sup>36</sup>

The belief Boone was a Freemason stems mostly from his 1845 reinterment in Frankfort, Kentucky where Freemasons, along with a reported 25,000 other people, attended the ceremony. English writer Walton Rippon published “Modern Operatives and their Claims” in the *Builder Magazine*, Volume 12, Number 2, in February 1926. According to the Lake Harriet Lodge No. 214, Minneapolis, the paper states: “From the fact that in 1845 there was a turnout of Masons in full regalia who participated in the ceremonies attending the reinterment of [Boone’s] remains at Frankfort [and] that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky later contributed \$50 toward the erection of a monument in that city, conclusions might be drawn that [Boone] most probably was a member of the Craft.” The phrase “might be drawn,” was apparently overlooked by later members of the Fraternity searching for evidence that Boone was a Mason.

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, DC, 1850.

<sup>36</sup> Jerald E. Marsengill, “Slaughtering Sacred Cows.” A paper found at Iowa Masonic Library & Museum, Grand Lodge of Iowa, Cedar Rapids, 2011, copied and provided to the author by George Harrison. No date or publication reference was on the binder that contained the paper. The story also appears in *How To Kick A Sacred Cow And Other Thrilling Tales From The Great Rebellion*, First Edition, The Grand Lodge Of Iowa Research Lodge No. 2, and Ronald E. Heaton, “Notes on a List of Some Conjectured American Freemasons,” *Fiat Lux*, The Philalethes Society, 2009. John W. Bizzack, Dan M. Kemble, Foreword and Contributor, *Notable Men in the History of Kentucky Who Happened to be Freemasons, Notable Men Often Reported as Freemasons but Were Not, and Unraveling the Tallest of Tales: Origin of the Myth That Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett Were Freemasons*, BSF Foundation, Lexington, KY, 2014,

That “Masons in full regalia participated in the ceremonies” is not conclusive evidence a Masonic funeral took place, nor does the report that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky’s contribution of fifty dollars toward the erection of a monument prove Boone was a Mason. There are, of course, blogs, chat rooms, and other cut-and-paste “contributions” to the alleged connection, but those are unreliable. If any reference is given in such writings, it is usually the one above.

There do exist other circumstances that led to the long-standing erroneous claim of Boone’s Masonic affiliation. Colonel John Johnson, a Boone pallbearer, narrated his observations of Boone’s reinterment in an article printed in the *Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, on August 31, 1876. In that article, he notes: “The Military, Freemasons, and Odd Fellows were out in their appropriate uniform, and in large numbers.”<sup>37</sup> Again, the report that the military, Freemasons, and Odd Fellows attended the reinterment is not evidence that Boone was a Mason.

Johnson’s reference to the Odd Fellows creates a new element that might be added to the guesswork employed by some historians and others about Boone’s affiliation in fraternal organizations. The Odd Fellows were founded in North America in April 1819, in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>38</sup> Although they attended Boone’s reinterment, Odd Fellows did not claim Boone was a member of their fraternity in any of their known writings or documents where they list “Notable Men” who were members of their organization.<sup>39</sup>

So, why were the Odd Fellows in attendance at Boone’s reinterment? For the same reason the military, ranking federal and state politicians, and purportedly 25,000 people, along with Freemasons, were present: the importance and historic nature of the reinterment of a famous pioneer.

Famed statesman, United States Attorney General, United States senator, and former governor of Kentucky John Jordan Crittenden delivered the oratory at Boone’s reinterment. Crittenden was a Freemason. There was no mention in his speech that day, or in his later writings, of Boone, as “Brother.” Kentuckian Richard M. Johnson, the ninth vice-president of the United States was a Freemason and Boone pallbearer. Neither is there any record of his referring to Boone as a brother in his remarks nor in his later writings.

Furthermore, there is no known record from any Masonic lodge in Kentucky, near or where Boone lived and held public elected office that confirms he was a visitor or a Mason. There exist no known records from states in which Boone lived (Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Missouri) proving a visitation or membership. Boone was indeed acquainted with men who were known Masons. It is possible he was initiated in a military lodge, even a British military lodge, during the period in which he served in the French and Indian Wars (1753-

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<sup>37</sup> Col. John Johnson, *Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, *A Short History of Franklin County, Kentucky*, August 31, 1876, and Kouns, genealogy site, <http://www.miles-shute-kouns->

<sup>38</sup> The Sovereign Grand Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows, <http://www.ioof.org/jurisdictions/kentucky.html>, accessed, March 1, 2012

<sup>39</sup> The first Odd Fellow Lodge in Kentucky was established in 1834. <https://www.state-journal.com/2017/03/23/odd-fellows-lodge-177th-birthday-brings-hope-to-historic-order>, accessed December 2018. The fraternal order came first came to Missouri in 1835, Odd Fellows Home, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/odd-fellows-home>, accessed December 2018. Boone died in 1820.

1764) but again, no records are available.<sup>40</sup> Had he been initiated in one of the military lodges or elsewhere prior to the publication of American author, Kentucky historian, pioneer, and surveyor John Filson's widely distributed book in 1784,<sup>41</sup> in which we find the first descriptive account and a narrative of Boone's life, it is unreasonable to believe the Filson, a Freemason himself, would not have noted Boone's affiliation with Masonry.

Based on marks and letters carved on his tombstone, Boone's father, Squire Boone, is often accepted and recognized as a Mason. It was common at the time for sons whose fathers were Masons to also become Masons, which suggests to some that Daniel Boone followed in his father's Masonic footsteps. If one uses the argument that Boone was a Mason because his father was a Mason, the fact that no known record exists proving Daniel Boone's son Nathan was a Mason, or any other of his four sons, seriously troubles that notion.

Claiming alleged "Masonic" symbols on Squire Boone's gravestone to prove he was a Freemason is questionable and far from conclusive. The original gravestone for Squire Boone was in the ground. Vandals had chipped pieces off the stone, so the city of Mocksville, North Carolina, put the stone in a vault until a brick monument could be built to display what was left of the stone.<sup>42</sup>

When that gravestone is closely examined, one might choose to perceive the letter "A" (visible seven times in the wording on the stone) as having characteristics similar to those of a Masonic square and compass. A closer look reveals the letter "A" is merely the letter "A" and not a Masonic symbol.

In the lower right-hand corner of the stone there is a circle and inside that circle is a point. The symbol of the point within the circle is easily recognized by Masons as a symbol used in the fraternity. Like many Masonic symbols, however, the exact origin of the point in a circle is unknown. Is this supposed to be evidence that Boone was a Mason?

Neal Hammon's 1999 work as editor of *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone* contains oral historian Draper's interview with Nathan Boone. The oral interview occurred twenty-one years after the death of Daniel Boone in Defiance, Missouri, and some sixty to eighty years after many of the events they spoke of. The information, therefore, is suspect. Robert Morgan quotes Hammon's work and notes that Draper's interview reports Nathan Boone saying:

Father's body was conveyed to Flanders Callaway's home at Charette,  
[Missouri] and there the funeral took place. There were no military or Masonic  
honors, the latter of which he was a member, as there were then but very few in

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<sup>40</sup> Clarence R. Martin, "Traveling Military Lodges, Their History. Do Present Day Conditions Warrant a Continuance of the Practice?" Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in the United States, Washington, D.C. February 23,24, 1943.

<sup>41</sup> John Filson, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky*, published in Wilmington, Delaware in 1784.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Genealogy Web Archives, North Carolina, Davie County, North Carolina, Squire and Sarah Boone, <http://www.usgwarchives.net/nc/davie/boone/boone01.htm>, accessed January 2013.

that region of the country.<sup>43</sup>

The history of the Grand Lodge of Missouri reflects that Boone resided in the Missouri Territory before and after Missouri became a state. Before his death in 1820, a total of six regularly chartered lodges operated in the area Nathan Boone referred to as “the region.” Nathan Boone’s claim that there were “very few” lodges in the “region” is incorrect. There were six lodges.<sup>44</sup>

Nathan Boone saying, “There were no military or Masonic honors, the latter of which he was a member,” is not proof either. The statement may illustrate that Nathan may have *believed* his father was a member of the fraternity. He may have assumed his father was a Mason simply because he frequented the company of Masons, or because Squire Boone, his grandfather, was supposedly a Mason. Or he may have just inadvertently embellished his father’s legacy.

Daniel Boone did not write his memoirs, and the earliest authors who wrote about him did not mention Boone being a Freemason. Those who knew him personally and who were quoted about his life experiences and personality never referred to him as a Mason, even though some of them were Masons themselves. There are no known contemporary documents, letters, speeches, or other eyewitness accounts that refer to Boone as a Freemason.

Boone was in Kentucky in 1778 when Lexington Lodge No. 25, now Lexington Lodge No. 1, was first chartered by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. He was associated with the first officers and members of the lodge and, had he been a Mason, lived close enough to that lodge to visit. Many early members lived farther from the lodge than Boone. Because of his celebrity at the time, it is illogical to accept that Boone was a member or visited Lexington Lodge—or any emerging lodges in the area—without any reference or notation in Masonic records then or later.

Boone left Kentucky in 1799 and migrated to Missouri. No evidence has been discovered that he became a Mason in Missouri or attended one of the early lodges chartered in that territory.

The writings and valid history of Boone’s exploits and life certainly suggest he conducted himself in ways compatible with Masonic values. But the issue of whether Boone was a member of the Craft based on what has been put forward since his reinternment in Frankfort, Kentucky in 1852 remains undocumented and unproven. Claims that he was a Mason continue to illustrate poor research if it is based on any of the assertions found in this paper.

Another kind of misty Masonic myth is about Revolutionary War Continental Army colonel, Richard Clough Anderson who was later during the War the aid-de-camp to General Marquis de Lafayette. In 1788, he was named first Master of Lexington Lodge 25 in Lexington, Kentucky.<sup>45</sup> Anderson was claimed to have been on the first boat that crossed the Delaware River with

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<sup>43</sup> Neal O. Hammon, ed., *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone*, Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Robert J. Wheeler, *History, St. Louis Missouri Lodge No. 1*, <http://stlmasons.org/history>, accessed January 30, 2013.

General Washington to engage the enemy in the pivotal battle in December 1776, at Trenton, New Jersey.<sup>46</sup> Anderson was at the battle. In fact, he was wounded, but he was not on the first boat with Washington because Washington was in the last boat to cross the river ensuring the safe passage of his troops before advancing to victory.<sup>47</sup> Anderson was in the first wave of soldiers who crossed the river the night before the battle on a reconnaissance mission.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, it is claimed that Anderson is one of the people depicted in the boat with Washington in the famous 1849 Emanuel Leutze painting, “Washington Crossing the Delaware,” which was painted seventy-five years after Washington’s legendary victory at Trenton, New Jersey.<sup>49</sup> And although genealogy sites make the claim that Anderson is one of the figures in the boat—and Masonic writings promote that story, along with the Grand Lodge Kentucky website until 2013—it is not true. The people in the boat in Leutze’s painting represent a diverse group meant to convey themes of unity, diversity, freedom, and independence. Anderson is not among them. However, eighteen-year-old Lt. James Monroe was depicted in the painting.<sup>50</sup> Monroe would later become the fifth President of the United States, fought in the Battle of Trenton, and wounded, was taken to a hospital in Princeton in a horse-drawn gun carriage.<sup>51</sup> Beside him in that carriage was the wounded Anderson. It is Monroe who is depicted by Leutze in the painting. Interestingly, Monroe is recorded as a visitor to Anderson’s plantation known as Soldier’s Retreat in Hurstbourne, Kentucky in later years following the War.<sup>52</sup> As president, Monroe appointed Anderson’s son, Richard Clough Anderson, Jr., in 1823 as the first American diplomat to Colombia.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Lexington Lodge 25 was originally chartered by the Grand Lodge Virginia in 1788. It was redesignated Lexington Lodge No. 1 in 1800 when the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was formed.

<sup>46</sup> Brent Coleman, “Meet The Andersons, A Family Of Repute With Local Roots That Shaped The Course Of U.S. History,” WCPO, Cincinnati. <https://www.wcpo.com/news/insider/meet-the-andersons-a-family-of-repute-with-local-roots-that-shaped-the-course-of-us-history>, accessed August 2016, *American Aristocracy*, Richard Clough Anderson (1750-1826), <https://americanaristocracy.com/people/richard-clough-anderson>, accessed September 2024. The Grand Lodge of Kentucky website (the claim that Anderson was in the first boat across the Delaware and appears in the boat with Washington in the historical painting, “Washington Crossing the Delaware,” by German-American artist Emanuel Leutze depicting General George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware River with the Continental Army on the night of December 25–26, 1776, during the American Revolutionary War. The posting and story were removed from the site around 2013-2014.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph J Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer: The Birth of American Independence*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2013, David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> University of Michigan, The Richard Clough Anderson papers contain ten letters from several veterans regarding land in central Ohio and northern Kentucky, granted to them by military warrants, Richard Clough Anderson papers, June 20, 1821-May 21, 1822, Box 12, Small Collections, Folder 201993. M-2955. 2.

<sup>49</sup> The American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati, Inc. <https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/washington-crossing-the-delaware-primary-source-analysis/>, accessed March 2025. From the American Institute of the Society of Cincinnati, Inc., website: The artist made the painting in 1849 in Düsseldorf, Germany. Leutze hoped it would inspire liberal reformers during the European Revolutions of 1848 to look to the American Revolution as an example of freedom and national identity, thus the artist’s rendering of a dramatic event in American history meant to convey themes of unity, diversity, freedom, and independence.

<sup>50</sup> The American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati, and Natalie Spassky, 1985, “Washington Crossing the Delaware,” *American Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born between 1816 and 1845. Vol. 2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. pp. 17–18. ISBN 978-0-87099-439-5 (According the catalogue of works, Edward Hand, and Nathaniel Greene, both generals under Washington are also depicted in Leutze’s painting).

<sup>51</sup> Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, Penguin Press, 2010, Thomas Fleming, *1776 Year of Illusions*, Norton & Company, 1975, David Jones, *Washington’s Generals and Opponents: Their Exploits and Leadership*, Da Capo Press, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Kitty Anderson, “Soldiers’ Retreat: A Historical House and its Famous People,” *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society*, Vol. 17, No. 51, September 1919.

<sup>53</sup> E. Taylor Parks, Alfred Tischendorf, *Cartagena to Bogotá, 1825-1826: The Diary of Richard Clough Anderson, Jr.*, Open Access, *Hispanic American Historical Review* (1962) 42 (2).

*By the darkest years of the Anti-Masonic craze, accurate accounts, information and details about Morgan and his background did not matter. It was not important to the Anti-Masonic movement if*

Known as **The Morgan Affair**, the 1826 abduction of William Morgan from the Canandaigua Jail in upstate western New York by Freemasons led to more than a decade of overwhelming repercussions that shook the foundations of Masonry in America. Although in jail after being accused of a minor crime, it was known to Masons in the area that he was preparing a manuscript to expose the workings of Freemasonry.

Morgan was never seen alive again after being held in captivity by Masons for about nine days. Anti-Masonic sentiments and suspicion of Masonry had been fermenting since the end of the 1790s. These sentiments were

inflamed by the 140 some Anti-Masonic newspapers and almanacs that suddenly appeared in the United States.<sup>54</sup> The calamitous effect suppressed Masonry in New York, if not most of New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.

By the darkest years of the Anti-Masonic craze, accurate accounts, information, and details about Morgan and his background did not matter. It was not important to the Anti-Masonic movement if Morgan was dead or alive. What mattered shifted to whether Masons, who held a significant number of political jobs and had friendly local and state authorities in their corner, perpetrated a cover-up to conceal crimes that reasonable people would believe were a result of Masons systematically violating the law.<sup>55</sup> Anti-Masonry evolved rather quickly from a moral crusade to a political movement.

What the movement ultimately produced was an extraordinary number of flawed narratives, an exceedingly high number of imperfections printed, spoken, testified to, and distributed from 1826 through the end of that century, the next, and still today.

Sober writings about the Morgan craze do exist, but they are often smothered by the mountainous assortment of these collected works that are packed with extreme bias, sloppy investigative skills, and poor scholarship by those on both sides of the issue.

There is one author and his 1884 book that stands superior to others in the latter category. Relying on the author's Masonic reputation at the time, defenders then and today, get a tidy conclusion to the Morgan Affair based on the author's attempt to weigh supposed facts surrounding the abduction during his supposed visit to upstate New York to attend a public memorial dedication for Morgan that was arranged by the National Christian Association.

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<sup>54</sup> William Leon Cummings, *Bibliography of Anti-masonry. With a Sketch of the "Morgan Affair and an Appendix Containing Several Important Documents Etc.* North Carolina Lodge of Research, No. 666. Syracuse, N.Y., September 24, 1933.

<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, "Freemasonry and Community in the Early Republic: The Case for Anti-Masonic Anxieties," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 5, Winter, 1982.

The lack of verifiable sources and invented witnesses who conveniently died years before these accounts were made public by the author decorate an obvious and deliberate lie in the 1884 book.<sup>56</sup> That lie puts the author and the credibility of most of his book in question. No matter, that book continues to be cited and quoted by writers, Masonic websites, and armchair detectives (Masons or not) and was rarely challenged until 2016.<sup>57</sup> The credibility of the author came under scrutiny again in 2024 and 2025 in a careful and factual examination of his entire Masonic career.<sup>58</sup> The author of the 1884 book, *William Morgan; or Political Anti-Masonry, its Rise, Growth and Decadence* was **Rob Morris**, the 1859 Grand Master of Kentucky.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, another painting contributed to an additional misty Masonic myth. In 1926, “The Petition” was painted by world-renowned artist **John Ward Dunsmore**.<sup>59</sup> The fifty-nine by forty-three-inch painting portrays the dozens of Revolutionary War Masons who were present on December 27, 1779, when American Union Lodge No. 1 met at Arnold's Tavern in Morristown, New Jersey. The Grand Lodge of Connecticut chartered American Union Lodge. It was the famous Military Lodge that George Washington reportedly attended on several occasions. Today, the lodge is located in Marietta, Ohio. Those present that evening listened to Continental Army General Mordecai Gist read a petition in which he put forth the idea that there should be a General Grand Lodge for the United States. The petition was unanimously approved by the lodge and a committee formed by the Master to coordinate the planning of a convention of the existing Grand Lodges in America. A convention was called, but the measure failed. This was but the first of nine attempts between 1779 and 1859 to form a National Grand Lodge in America.<sup>60</sup> All attempts failed.

The image of “The Petition” painting appeared in the March 1927, issue of the New Jersey edition of *Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons*.<sup>61</sup> In the painting, Dunsmore depicts **Alexander Hamilton**, Washington’s chief staff aide during the Revolution and later the first Secretary of the Treasury, sitting in the Northeast Corner of the lodge that evening. Dunsmore,

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen Dafoe, “The Lie Rob Morris Told,” *The Square* Vol. 42 No. 4, December 2016.

<sup>57</sup> IBID.

<sup>58</sup> John W. Bizzack, “Deciphering Rob Morris,” Presentation at The Shapers of our Ritual Conference, The Rubicon Masonic Society, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, The Philaethes Society, Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky, September 20, 2024. John W. Bizzack, “The Sword of Scrutiny, The Uneven And Meandering Course To Find And Explore Facts About The Morgan Affair,” William O. Ware Lodge of Research Papers, May, 2025, <https://williamowarelodgeofresearch.com/>, accessed May 2025.

<sup>59</sup> The renowned painter John Ward Dunsmore (1856-1945) was born near Cincinnati, Ohio and studied his craft in New York and Paris. In the 1890's he taught painting and was for several years Director of the Art Museum in Detroit, Michigan. The latter part of his life was spent in New York City where he specialized in portraits and historical subjects. Many of his paintings are hanging in the Headquarters of the Society of the Cincinnati in New York, and in Museums throughout the country. Brother Dunsmore was a member of Puritan Lodge No. 185 in Hoboken, New Jersey. “The Petition” is on permanent exhibition in the Revolutionary Room, Historical Park of the Historical Museum of the Morristown, New Jersey—being on indefinite loan from the New York Historical Society.

<sup>60</sup> “A United Grand Lodge,” *The American Freemason's New Monthly Magazine* 4, no. 1, July 1859 (this article has no byline noted, but Albert G. Mackey, the editor of this magazine, is believed to have authored the article), John W. Bizzack, *Sins of Our Masonic Fathers: The Lost Strength of Fewness in American Freemasonry*, BSF Foundation, Lexington, Kentucky, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> “The Petition,” New Jersey Edition of *Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons* 2, No. 9, March 1927, page 137, David McGregor, “Contribution to the Early History of Freemasonry in New Jersey: Freemasonry at Morristown during the Revolutionary War,” *Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons*, 2, no. 9, March 1927.

using his license as an artist, sparked the myth that continues to this day that Hamilton was a Freemason.

The belief of Hamilton's status as a member of the Fraternity was "made a matter of record in many articles and publications" and lingered for twenty-eight years.<sup>62</sup> While references to the painting were used to support the claim during that time, other flimsy evidence emerged that is still cited as evidence of the claim. Regardless, in 2009 a serious researcher published his findings that explained that there was a man named Hamilton who visited American Union Lodge in 1779 and 1780, but records show that man was Lieutenant John Hamilton, who was not related to Alexander but who was a Mason. While poorly collected information that was passed on for almost three decades claimed there was only one Hamilton that held a commission in the Continental Army at the time, later research proved there were over fifty men with that last name serving at the time.<sup>63</sup> None with the first name of Alexander.

While this paper is not intended to address each of the numerous incorrect listings of notable men that Masons have and (in some cases) continue to claim to be Freemasons despite evidence to the contrary, one more is worth adding.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Masonic writer and the historian of the Grand Council of Connecticut Royal and Select Masters, James R. Case, ended the belief Alexander Hamilton was a Mason in 2009 (*Fiat Lux*, a book published by The Philalethias Society) Case cites in his essay in *Fiat Lux*, that Edmund D. Halsey's study title, "Freemasonry in Morristown in the Revolutionary War," published in 1900 as Appendix A to the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of New Jersey, categorically stated that it was Alexander Hamilton who visited American Union Lodge on December 27, 1779 and March 6, 1780, which was likely the starting point of this notion and story. As Case shows in "The Hamilton Bi-Centennial" in *Fiat Lux*, a man named Hamilton did indeed visit the American Union Lodge in 1779 and 1780, but it was Lieutenant John Hamilton of the first Maryland regiment and member of Lodge 6 in Maryland. Hamilton was a later member of Military Lodge 29. Case also notes in his essay, "Since the appearance of the Halsey story, the identification of Alexander Hamilton as a Freemason has been made a matter of record in many articles and publications." It should also be noted that a 1946 updated edition of Mackey's *Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* goes as far as to state that it was Alexander who was present at Morristown and Hamilton was identified because [he was] the only one of that name then holding a commission in the army." Clearly, the person updating Mackey's work, either read Halsey's work or simply repeated it. Halsey's broad statement can readily be refuted by reference to "Heitmann's Register of Continental Officers" where no less than twenty-two Hamiltons are listed as soldiers in the Continental Army. The DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] Ancestral Register contains at least forty Hamilton's and SAR [Sons of the American Revolution] records have more than twice as many. The Hamilton name, it seems, were an extensively patriotic group. Ray V. Denslow in *10,000 Famous Freemasons* (Missouri Lodge of Research, 1957) also discredits information about Hamilton being a Mason, but aptly points out that Phillip Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton's youngest son who was an assistant district attorney in New York, was indeed a Mason—a member of Albion Lodge 26, and Master of the same in 1829. Henry C. Coil's, *Coil's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Macy, 1961) also discredits all claims that Alexander Hamilton was a Freemason.

<sup>63</sup> IBID.

<sup>64</sup> For details that discredit the notion that all signers of the Declaration of Independence were Masons and that all generals serving under Washington in the Revolutionary War were generals, see, Jerald E. Marsengill, "Slaughtering Sacred Cows." A paper found at Iowa Masonic Library & Museum, Grand Lodge of Iowa, Cedar Rapids, 2011, copied and provided to the author by George Harrison. No date or publication reference was on the binder that contained the paper. The story also appears in *How To Kick A Sacred Cow And Other Thrilling Tales From The Great Rebellion*, First Edition, The Grand Lodge Of Iowa Research Lodge No. 2, 1973.

The notion that **Thomas Jefferson** was a Freemason has been debated extensively over the years. While some have claimed his involvement with Freemasonry, credible historical evidence supporting this assertion remains shrouded with misinformation. That Jefferson associated with men who were confirmed Masons, does not make Jefferson a Mason although it is common to find that reasoning used. The discovery of Jefferson noted as one of the United States presidents who were Freemasons in the Harry S. Truman Library in Missouri (Truman was a Mason), is often used as evidence, although it has been determined that that item listing Jefferson as a Mason was a gift to Truman that ended up in his presidential library with no supporting evidence to verify that claim of Jefferson's membership in the Fraternity.<sup>65</sup> Jefferson's attendance at the 1817 Masonic Cornerstone Ceremony at Central College (now the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia where Jefferson lived) is not evidence that Jefferson was a Mason any more than evidence that multiple dozens of other men in the community who attended that ceremony were Masons.<sup>66</sup>

As we learn from honest research in 1989, there were three lodges active in Albemarle County, Virginia, in close proximity to Mr. Jefferson's home at Monticello,<sup>67</sup> yet there are no records of his attendance or participation. It seems almost inconceivable that if Thomas Jefferson were made a Mason in, or ever attended a meeting of any of these lodges, the records would certainly have so indicated—especially considering his prominence in Virginia and the new nation. That they do not is compelling evidence in itself that Mr. Jefferson was not a Mason. Furthermore, there is no evidence or reference in any of his correspondence or other writings to indicate that he was a Freemason.”<sup>68</sup>

In fact, the only reference known to have been made by Mr. Jefferson relative to the subject of Freemasonry was in a letter to Bishop James Madison, written in Philadelphia on January 31, 1800, concerning the views of Adam Weishaupt, a German professor of canon law in Bavaria and founder of the Bavarian Illuminati.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of available evidence to the contrary, the mistaken notion that Jefferson was a Mason continued to be referred to as a “Brother Mason.”<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Historically, the study and documentation of Freemasonry have revealed a range of inconsistencies and biases, as not all researchers or writers have approached the topic with rigorous scrutiny. This has led to variations in the accuracy and interpretation of Masonic history over time. The ideas and perspectives reflected in Masonic writing are often influenced by the

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<sup>65</sup> Lewis A. Martin, Jr., “Thomas Jefferson and a Masonic Ceremony,” Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 research paper and presentation, September 23, 1989, <http://www.researchlodge.org/Papers/Thomas%20Jefferson%20and%20a%20Masonic%20Ceremony.pdf>, accessed May 2019.

<sup>66</sup> IBID.

<sup>67</sup> IBID. (Door to Virtue Lodge No. 44, established in 1795, its last recorded meeting being held on March 31, 1821; Widows' Sons' Lodge No. 60, which is still active; and that same Lodge having received a dispensation authorizing the temporary establishment of a lodge in the town of Milton, Albemarle County, Virginia, on October 17, 1799, with its charter being issued by the Grand Lodge of Virginia on December 17, 1799).

<sup>68</sup> IBID.

<sup>69</sup> Compilation and notes by Merrill D. Peterson of “Thomas Jefferson, Writings,” p. 1076, 1984, (Peterson was Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Virginia).

<sup>70</sup> Masonic Mountain Men, Ambassadors for Freemasonry, <https://msmmm.us/index.php/about/>, accessed, June 2025.

intellectual and cultural context of the majority of its members. As a result, the legacy of Freemasonry's literature is shaped not only by its ideals but also by the distinct characteristics of many within its ranks.

If the basis for promoting the association of notable or famous men with Freemasonry is to portray the fraternity as an organization of influence, intellect, and prestige and to bolster its public perception, then there is an argument that can be made. Counter to that argument is that the true legitimacy of Freemasonry lies in its teachings, traditions, and the dedication of its members, rather than in the fame of individuals who have been associated with it. When a famous or notable man is promoted by the Fraternity as having been a Mason and it is later determined that the claim is based on hearsay, faulty memories, or unverified yarns, the Fraternity can be said to be its own worst enemy.<sup>71</sup>

Freemasonry needs no such legitimization that may come from affiliating itself with notable or famous men.<sup>72</sup> The lessons of Freemasonry transcend time and place and are applicable in any era. The lamentable practice of stubbornly clinging to discredited ideas and legends that have no basis in fact simply diminishes the credibility of those who consider themselves historians of any

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design and serves only to make Freemasonry appear preening and silly.<sup>73</sup> This is especially true today when so many records and material are available for serious researches to more thoroughly explore the veracity of many claims—not only about Masonry but the famous and notable men who are consistently reported to be Masons but were not. One remedy to that issue, of course, is better instruction as men pass through degrees and consistently promoting what often appears a foreign concept to many members and their leaders: reading and study of Freemasonry and search for truth.

Evidently, the comfort of legend continues to outweigh the discomfort of truth. The flawed notion exists today that all Masonic symbols used today were designed by the men in the room in 1717 at the Goose and Gridiron tavern in St. Paul's Churchyard, London that formed the Premier Grand Lodge England. Another couple of remarkably flawed notions that suggest King Solomon's Temple was built in England and that doing the business of the Lodge only on the

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<sup>71</sup> Dan M. Kemble, Foreword, *Notable Men In Kentucky Who Happened To Be Freemasons: Notable Men Often Reported as Freemasons But Were Not, and Unraveling the Tallest of Tales: Origin of the Myth That Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket Were Freemasons*, BSF Foundation, Lexington, KY, 2014. This research (with the same title) was updated and published again in 2024 in *The Transactions of the Rubicon Masonic Society, Volume 1*.

<sup>72</sup> IBID.

<sup>73</sup> IBID.

Master Mason degree is the way it has been done for 1,000 years also exist, and not from just some Masons but others who write about it and expect others to believe their view without any supporting evidence. These absurd assertions mirror the outlandish conspiracy theories that are frequently propagated through selective interpretations of Masonic writings, ceremonies, and rituals. Taken out of their proper context, these snippets often appear on social media platforms and dubious internet sites, where they are presented by cranks and other individuals lacking credible understanding or basic research skills. Such distortions serve only to fuel misconceptions, perpetuated by those eager to sensationalize rather than seek truth.

Yes, the *Masonic antiquarians and cranks* that Roberts characterized in 1969 continue to live among us and the *bottomless bog* to which Yates referred in 1972 has yet to be drained. To paraphrase Charles Porset: that still does not give *cart blanche* to anyone to write whatever they want.

We cannot begin to reasonably expect all admitted into our ranks to be or become Masonic scholars. That is not part of the purpose of Masonry. However, we can do much to at least provide those we admit with a foundation of factual information about Masonry to help guide them on their journey. If there is a valid argument that supports the claim that *every Masonic Lodge* always has and continues to do at least that much, then present that argument with details that can withstand honest scrutiny.

Freemasonry, like any other worthy topic, deserves not only a legitimate scholarship but *studentship* and the only path to both is the unyielding application of a seriousness of purpose in not only how we conduct ourselves, but in what we write about any aspect of the Craft. That starts with Lodges consistently providing wholesome instruction and education to all they choose to admit.

In Masonry, the concept of light is deeply symbolic and is equated with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. When a Mason speaks of seeking light, the reference is to the pursuit of greater insight and truth, both about themselves and the world around them. Light, in this sense, represents not just the accumulation of knowledge but also the wisdom to apply it toward

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bettering oneself and humanity as a whole. Embodying this concept we find the Latin phrase *Fiat Lux et Lux Fiat*, "Let there be light, and there was light."

Masons who want to write about any topic related to Freemasonry today and certainly in the future would do well to ask themselves if, in fact, their writings will provide such light so there can actually be light. Whether addressing historical,

philosophical, or practical aspects of the Craft, Masonic authors bear the responsibility to ensure

their work does inspire enlightenment and ultimately contributes to the guiding principle of shedding light where there is darkness.

This paper does not suggest that Masons who are not scholars or academically inclined should refrain from writing about Freemasonry or any aspect of it. On the contrary, they should feel encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights. But it is vital that they carefully differentiate their personal speculation and individual views from established, well-supported details and existing evidence. Such discernment ensures that their contributions remain constructive and credible, upholding the broader understanding of Masonry while promoting thoughtful discourse that can withstand critical examination and scrutiny.

Misty myths, baseless speculation, and other imaginative, unsubstantiated writings about Masonry and the Fraternity burden the path to genuine knowledge and lead deeper into a bottomless bog of confusion and misinformation—a fate that thoughtful, well-researched, and honest writing always aims to prevent. It cannot be understated that the responsibility of any earnest inquiry or narrative regarding Masonry is to seek truth, to illuminate rather than obscure. Without such vigilance and dedication to accuracy, the principles of this institution risk being overshadowed by a haze of misunderstanding, distorting its essence and legacy.

As is often heard in well-governed lodges, “Take due notice thereof and govern yourselves accordingly.”